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ABSTRACT

To motivate the urban adolescent, to offer a program of skills geared to work and life, and to reduce the need for remediation at the college level, LaGuardia (New York) Community College established a middle college, a new educational subunit, to cover the last three years of secondary school and the community college sequence with a program focus on remediation and career education. Flexible pacing and articulation between high school and college were embodied in the use of the college site and in the sharing of courses with the college. Process evaluation highlights the problems and values inherent in the teacher-counselor role as a facilitating factor in remediation. (Author)

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The Middle College High School
A New Model for Remediation

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Middle College is a new educational substructure covering the five years from the tenth grade in high school through the second year of the community college. The concept of an articulated program framed around a remedial core was an attempt to bridge the gap between high school and college for urban youth.

In terms of student welfare, the need is obvious. The high school drop cut rate is 45%. Where students stay in high school, the institution frequently runs out of curriculum in the twelfth year and 30% of the senior year is repeated in the freshman year of college. Researchers find that puberty for males and females has been occuring two years earlier for today's adolescents than for their grandparents. They are old enough for war, for the pill, for driving, yet the average high school retains controls and supervisory practises designed more for children then for promoting adult self direction. Similarly, our psychologists emphasize that the 16 year old has more in common with his 20 year old peer then with her 12 year old sister. Sociologists decry the separation of our teenagers from significant contact with adults and the delayed entry into the real adult world. "In prolonging youth's dependence we have used our schools inadvertently as the social aging vats that have isolated adolescents and delayed their learning adult roles,

work habits, and skills."*

In regard to work, "unemployment figures for high school youth are generally double national figures, while to be black, urban and young is to at least double that figure again." Yet, adolescents want to work; they need the skills, the practise and the experience to succeed.

The new substructure offers specific advantages. The introduction of cooperative education beginning in the high school gives the college student better career education and more motivation. Since accrediting procedures are changing, the old Carnegie unit is now supplemented by flexible procedures which recognize experience and training outside the classroom. These new opportunities enable a student to progress at his own pace, with remediation where needed and with acceleration where desired. Self pacing eliminates the wasteful overlaps; the college setting can mesh those years by enabling high school students to take college courses and create the possibility of time shortened degrees. The presence of successful peer models at the college level attracts students to higher education.

All these factors are important from the college's viewpoint, but the single most significant fact is the skill deficit which the entering freshmen brings to the college level.

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*Martin, John Henry - "National Panel on High Schools and Adolescent Education" - Public Education Association, NYC - Pg. 3

Numbers of students needing help necessitates a heavy investment of personnel and facilities in remediation classes which could be more effectively taught at lower levels. And so the Middle College was conceived.

Predicated on practical need, philosophical reasoning, and seed money from the Carnegie Corporation and the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education, the design focused on five areas: remediation, articulation, flexible pacing, career education, and a new role for teachers.

Statistics about dropouts, cutting and lack of achievement testified to the need in the urban population. Other programs and plans accommodated the bright, achieving student, but there was ample evidence of a neglected group, namely the high risk student who had a record of underachievement and lack of success in the traditional setting. The planners determined to seek as the student body for the Middle College, those adolescents who had an educational history of underachieving.

To change the students' pattern of non-involvement, Middle College stressed freedom and responsibility. The aim was to embody the remedial teaching in the career areas, health and human services, creative and applied arts, business, etc.

The plan integrated the skill teaching in terms of careers, hoping to make the learning more meaningful and more personalized for the adolescent. Middle College, designed to take the student

at the end of the ninth year, presupposed that the earliest start in remediation offered the greatest hope for optimal results.

Specific skills, i.e., knowledge of subtraction were enumerated for each entry level job, i.e., checker in supermarket. The reading and writing curricula centered thematically in Who Am I and led the adolescent into ever widening circles of identification: family, school, work, community, etc.

A number of curriculum and structural innovations aimed to promote more effective learning; the program featured an interdisciplinary curriculum. Setting the program in the college and aiming at flexible pacing, the Middle College offered articulated five year programs where high school students could take college courses.

Much of the philosophy of remedial programs rests on two propositions: increasing motivation and self-esteem and/or better, more individualized teaching in a diagnostic prescriptive mode. Middle College tried to utilize these premises in restructuring the teacher role into the teacher-counselor role. Every teacher is a teacher counselor, responsible for fifteen students primarily in a house unit.

Students know that his particular teacher counselor monitors his progress and consults with other teachers. The Middle College

admits 125 students each year with a teacher/counselor-student ratio of one to fifteen; while requiring much orientation and hard work, the teacher counselor role aims to overcome the de-personalization and fragmentation of contemporary life. The concept concentrates on providing a model for identificatioan and an advisor who knows and cares. Supervision of remedial progress is one of the most important functions of the teacher counselor.

Since we are trying something which has not been tried before, we can not claim to have the answers. There are bound to be problems, but our focus is to advance our understanding of remedial teaching. With that caveat and context, we feel that we have some learnings to share with the educational community.